

Christian Gerlach

# Introduction: Social histories of persecution and mass violence

Social histories of persecution are a rare thing. And this is one of very few collections with a social history approach encompassing more than one case of mass violence.<sup>1</sup> The study of ‘genocide’ or mass violence is a highly politicized field, which has resulted in a hegemony of political science and political history approaches within it. Research about mass violence and persecution has been dominated by inquiries into political actors, ideas, events, organizational structures, and political systems.

Scholarship dealing more specifically with people under persecution has provided more in the way of social history, but often lacks a comprehensive or systematic social analysis. Understanding violence as constituted by social relations and interaction, the authors of this volume aim at a fuller understanding of the process of persecution, of its complex effects and of the social conditions of life under persecution. For doing this, we conceive of social history in a broad sense, including phenomena reaching from economic activities to experiences of displacement to the emotional side of interaction or isolation. More precisely, it is not only social history that this volume offers, but social research more broadly, because this is a multidisciplinary volume with social anthropologists, a literary scholar and a geographer among its authors.

This book is primarily about the experience of those exposed to mass violence (the so-called victims’ side). Many contributions here deal with the persecution of European Jews in the 1930s and 1940s, but others examine the experience of other groups in the Second World War, Armenians in the late Ottoman Empire, and some African societies in the 20th century. What we aim at – always aware of the specific context – are insights into persecution beyond the individual historical case.<sup>2</sup>

The themes in this volume are: labor; family; the life of domestic refugees; space; collective action; violence as a social process; and society after violence.

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1 See Jutta Bakonyi and Berit Bliesemann de Guevara, eds. *A Micro-Socology of Violence: Deciphering patterns and dynamics of collective violence* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012). See also the focus section “Extremely Violent Societies,” *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 10, 1 (2016): 4–92.

2 However, it is a limitation that all authors of this volume except for one are either from Europe or North America, and all of them are from industrial countries. In this sense, this is no global history. Efforts to involve scholars from other world regions were unsuccessful.

We deal with outcasts' interactions with each other and with the people surrounding them, arguably society, but much less with direct interaction with their persecutors. What we describe is life under persecution. Unlike an event-oriented political history, we inquire into longer-term processes and conditions.<sup>3</sup> How we are doing this concretely belongs to a specific phase in the research about mass violence and persecution. In this introduction, some reflections about our approaches and categories are put forth.

## Different sorts of social history

The question is appropriate: what kind of social history (or social research) do we practice? The classical type of social history is quantitative, abstract, impersonal, collective. Such work used to be about social class and strata, social hierarchies, a group's position within a social system, and the attempt to link social structures to processes and experiences. Often, the focus has been on lower classes, in part on production. However, there is not a single quantitative study among our contributions. Most chapters concentrate on the sphere of reproduction, and the term "class" appears only occasionally and, for the most part, marginally.<sup>4</sup>

Another type conceives of social history as being about social relations. This type might even deal with one individual. It is less anonymous, usually qualitative, more actor-centric. Sometimes it is about connectedness and networks. However, often the criteria in such a qualitative analysis appear not entirely clear, and the question of representativity arises, that is, of what is a study, or story, indicative beyond its immediate subject, or subjects?

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<sup>3</sup> This inquiry into conditions of life is also why the title of the volume speaks of "persecution," a more encompassing term than 'mass violence'; for what we examine goes much beyond direct violence. This term is used here despite of its problematic aspects: it is a politically charged, normative concept, denoting innocence of all 'victims'; and it has often been used in reference to religious groups. In languages like French and German, the term 'persecution' is more frequently used than in English.

<sup>4</sup> Note that, for example, there are few quantitative studies about the destruction of the European Jews, such as Nicolas Mariot and Claire Zalc, *Face à la persecution: 991 Juifs dans la guerre* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2010). And some studies that have made quantitative arguments have met with criticism, like Helen Fein, *Accounting for Genocide: National Responses and Jewish Victimization during the Holocaust* (New York and London: Free Press and Collier Macmillan, 1979) and Christian Gerlach, *The Extermination of the European Jews* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

Still another type of social history, arguably, inquires into social conflict. This approach looks for social forces and conditions that lead to violence; and usually not only for conditions – meaning that this type is about dynamics, and sometimes about connections between short-term and longer-term processes.

Most contributions in this book mix the second and third types of study, that is, inquiry into social relations and social conflict, and they do so in a specific fashion. They use qualitative methods on the basis of sources like survivor accounts, diaries, oral history, participant observation, official documents, and photographs.

In some ways, the examination of social relations and social conflict is in tune with recent – and not so recent – scholarship in the field. Take, for instance, sociology. Since Helen Fein, many scholars have complained about how little interest most sociologists take in genocide and mass violence and how limited their insights into this topic are. Often, such laments come in the form of articles about what sociology *could* do.<sup>5</sup> Sociologists' major contributions to the field are about powerholders, organizations involved, and obedience; mechanisms of group exclusion; and definitions of a new social order.<sup>6</sup> Put differently, sociologists maintain that a new social group (usually an ethno-racial group) is emerging, or solidified, during genocide. As if this ethnization overrides, or substitutes for, all other divisions in society, they usually say very little about other existing categories of social order like class, family, age and gender. In part, this explains why scholars often depict violence as having been disconnected from – or contradictory to – economic interests. Thus the ideas that many sociologists offer about the new social order are misleadingly simplified and highly deficient.<sup>7</sup> Societies in times of mass violence do not fall only into the groups of perpetrators, victims and bystanders.<sup>8</sup> One outcome of the ethno-racialized understanding of history and society is the concept of “victim society” which can be understood as an

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<sup>5</sup> See Helen Fein, *Genocide: A Sociological Perspective* (London et al.: Sage, 1993); Martin Shaw, “Sociology and Genocide,” *The Oxford Handbook of Genocide Studies*, eds. Donald Bloxham and Dirk Moses (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 42–62. Stefan Friedrich, *Soziologie des Genozids: Grenzen und Möglichkeiten einer Forschungsperspektive* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2012) expands this kind of study even to book length.

<sup>6</sup> See Shaw, “Sociology,” and Charles Anderton, “Genocide: Perspectives from the Social Sciences,” July 2015, [https://web.holycross.edu/RePEc/hcx/HC1508\\_Anderton\\_Genocide.pdf](https://web.holycross.edu/RePEc/hcx/HC1508_Anderton_Genocide.pdf) (accessed 13 January 2022), 11–14.

<sup>7</sup> In fashionable parlance one could say that sociologists' analyses suffer from a lack of intersectionality (if intersectionality were about more than questions of identity).

<sup>8</sup> See Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe 1933–1945* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1992). Many but not all contributions in Andrea Löw and Frank Bajohr, eds., *The Holocaust and European Societies: Social Processes and Social Dynamics* (London: Pal-

independent unit.<sup>9</sup> The assumption of a “perpetrator society” is equally problematic.<sup>10</sup>

Characteristically, many recent discussions concerning social research about mass violence have revolved around questions of scale. This is occurring in several disciplines. Some time ago, anthropologists and sociologists called for analyzing ‘violence itself’ instead of its genesis and context.<sup>11</sup> In sociology, the call is for a micro-sociology that looks at situations in which violence occurs.<sup>12</sup> Among political scientists, there is a “micropolitical turn in the study of social violence.”<sup>13</sup> A similar plea for, and practice of, microhistory has emerged as well.<sup>14</sup> Another move in this context has been toward the history of everyday life.<sup>15</sup> What does this trend toward smaller scales say?

Microhistory and micro-sociology constitute attempts to gain an empirical foothold and question macro-explanations. Both are necessary. But one can do a variety of things with micro-perspectives. They bear the danger of de-contextualization, for example in a sociology that looks at little else other than the immediate situation in which violence comes about.<sup>16</sup> Such research may be about bodily practices or spaces where violence happens and what this means. Those absent from the scene find little consideration. If “situationism” trumps “dispositionalism,” as Charles Anderton calls them, i.e. through a micro-perspective, psychology may also (again) weigh in heavily on explanations.<sup>17</sup>

On the other hand, there may be something to Stefan Friedrich’s critique that most sociologists have ignored mass violence because they celebrate modernity, see mass violence as a passing disturbance and emphasize macro-structures over

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grave Macmillan, 2016) still rely primarily on these categories as social groups, though emphasizing ambivalences.

<sup>9</sup> Anna Hájková, *The Last Ghetto: An Everyday History of Theresienstadt* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 2, 239–240. Hájková does provide for an interesting social history.

<sup>10</sup> Friedrich, *Soziologie*, 311.

<sup>11</sup> See Trutz von Trotha, ed., *Soziologie der Gewalt* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1997).

<sup>12</sup> Randall Collins, *Violence: A Micro-Sociological Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008). However, Bakonyi and Bliesemann de Guevara, *A Micro-Sociology* does not fall into this category, despite that book’s title, but is based on the understanding that violence is a “social [. . .] process” (ibid., 4).

<sup>13</sup> Charles King quoted in Lee Ann Fujii, *Killing Neighbors: Webs of Violence in Rwanda* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009), 19.

<sup>14</sup> Claire Zalc and Tal Bruttman, eds. *Microhistories of the Holocaust* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> See Andrea Löw et al., eds. *Alltag im Holocaust: Jüdisches Leben im Grossdeutschen Reich 1941–1945* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> See Collins, *Violence*.

<sup>17</sup> See Anderton, “Genocide”, on the social sciences including economics (quote p. 15).

agency.<sup>18</sup> However, the underlying assumption that social scientists have already clarified the basic social structures in and through which mass violence happens is erroneous.

Scholars have taken a variety of approaches to bridging the gap between macro- and micro-perspectives. In this volume, Tim Cole proposes ‘relational’ geographies for this purpose, combining both scales for understanding the destruction of the Jews.<sup>19</sup> Lee Ann Fujii has shown through a local study that existing social structures, in particular family and friendship ties and neighborly relations, did influence logics of action during the mass murders in Rwanda in the early 1990s. She pleaded for a broad contextualization of data from micro-studies.<sup>20</sup> Moritz Feichtinger and Andreas Zeman, using localized perspectives and thick description, have analyzed the social process among forcibly concentrated peoples in the decolonization wars of Algeria, Kenya and Mozambique, challenging, among other things, Pierre Bourdieu’s notions of social uprooting and transformation.<sup>21</sup> Jean-Paul Kimonyo studies three areas of Rwanda and attempts to connect economic, social and political history.<sup>22</sup> Sociologist Michael Mann tries to combine biographical data with a macro-explanation of “ethnic cleansing” and genocide.<sup>23</sup>

There are several micro studies in this volume. The chapters by Jason Tingler, Andreas Zeman and Anna Ohannessian-Charpin deal with small (rural) places. Tim Cole’s and Janina Wurbs’ chapters crystallize around one person or a few. Dalia Ofer links one Jewish man’s experience to a broader view of males and their social roles under persecution. By contrast, Masha Cerovic and Christian Gerlach have much larger frames, and Hilmar Kaiser tries to reach empirical ground by combining two regional studies of Ottoman Armenians’ survival.

Many chapters here take new topics and approaches. They employ labor history, the history of fatherhood, sound history, or look at the situation of domestic refugees. The anthropological study in this volume looks at the social situation long after violence has taken place, adopting more complex arguments than

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<sup>18</sup> Friedrich, *Soziologie*, esp. 310–311.

<sup>19</sup> See also Tim Cole, *Holocaust Landscapes* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

<sup>20</sup> Fujii, *Killing Neighbors*, esp. 42.

<sup>21</sup> See Moritz Feichtinger, ‘Villagization’: *A People’s History of Strategic Resettlement and Violent Transformation: Kenya and Algeria 1952–1962* (Ph.D thesis, University of Bern, 2016); Andreas Zeman, *The Winds of History: Life in a Corner of Rural Africa Since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2022 [forthcoming]); Pierre Bourdieu, *In Algerien: Zeugnisse der Entwurzelung* (Graz: Edition Camera Austria, 2005).

<sup>22</sup> Jean-Paul Kimonyo, *Rwanda’s Popular Genocide* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2016).

<sup>23</sup> Michael Mann, *The Dark Side of Democracy: Explaining Ethnic Cleansing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

other studies, and geographer Tim Cole goes further in the direction of recent spatial analyses of persecution.

Our volume is based on a workshop under the same title, held online on 11 and 12 February 2021 and organized at the University of Bern in the context of a research project called “Sounds of anti-Jewish persecution.”<sup>24</sup> This project used an approach that involved reconstructing sounds, listening and hearing as means of social history in order to explore power hierarchies, social relations and social order, everyday life, conflicts, violence, collective action, gender relations, the functioning of families, cultural and religious practice, emotions and self-construction. The source material upon which this research was based consisted of written material: wartime diaries, contemporary reports and post-liberation accounts of persecuted and formerly persecuted people, respectively. Unlike many sound histories about the 20th century which concentrate on technical sounds, mediated sounds and city noise, our focus was on the human voice – the noises most often mentioned in the sources by far. The project’s participants found that most descriptions of sounds related either to sounds produced by other persecuted people, often their interaction, or their interaction with wider society (rather than persecutors).<sup>25</sup>

There is no reason for enthusiasm concerning the state of the social history of violence. Our papers’ approaches too have limitations. Because of a bias in their source basis, some chapters show people from the bourgeoisie, intelligentsia or petty bourgeoisie on their social decline. It was primarily people with this social background who left diaries and memoirs, and they were more likely to get institutionally interviewed in the aftermath of a given violent period than poor people. Conducting one’s own interviews or using large collections of survivor accounts are ways to evade this bias. Some other chapters simply give no information about the class background of their persecuted protagonists.

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**24** The project was supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF-Projekt 100011\_172597/1), as is the publication of this volume. Nikita Hock, Janina Wurbs and Christian Gerlach are the authors in this volume who were members of this project. Notably, Anna Shternshis who was not part of the project also refers to sounds in her chapter in various ways. The authors of this volume are grateful for comments and suggestions made by an anonymous reviewer. For important technical help with the preparation of the manuscript of this book, I am indebted to Gabriele Jordan and Andreas Zeman.

**25** For first findings from this project, see Nikita Hock, “Making Home, Making Sense: Aural Experiences of Warsaw and East Galician Jews in Subterranean Shelters during the Holocaust,” *Transposition. Musique et Sciences Sociales* 1 (2020), [journals.openedition.org/transposition/4205](https://journals.openedition.org/transposition/4205) and Christian Gerlach, “Echoes of persecution: sounds in early post-liberation Jewish memories,” *Holocaust Studies* 24, 1 (2018): 1–25.

## Some findings

Most authors of this volume do not see chaos in times of mass violence or persecution. Instead, the social order in such periods takes on a new shape, new hierarchies are created, relations change, new communities emerge. The authors of this volume therefore examine how persecution deforms social life, but also reconfigures it. Even though the emerging social relations were highly unstable,<sup>26</sup> they seem to argue, countering Margaret Thatcher: “There is no such thing as no society.”

To some it may seem banal that there exists no absence of society, but this idea stands in contrast to, e.g., the atomization thesis, based on the outdated totalitarianism theory and popular since Hannah Arendt, for example in (diaspora) Polish scholarship.<sup>27</sup> Many chapters in this volume do acknowledge and examine social fragmentation, mobility and social dislocation, loosening ties and phenomena of exclusion, but they also explore how other ties between individuals and groups emerge. Persecuted people always attempted to establish new relations. In this frame, violence is both anti-social and social.

By studying everyday life and practices, the authors herein reveal traces of agency among people exposed to persecution and help scholarship to move further away from the image of the helpless victim. Such findings are generated thanks to the fact that these contributions look at something broader than the immediate situation in which direct violence occurred.<sup>28</sup>

It is significant that four contributors describe intimate relations of intermarriage or adoption involving people under persecution, or briefly after persecution (Aleksium, Gerlach, Ohannessian-Charpin and another chapter that is only included in the print version of this book). This has occurred in various contexts (late Ottoman society/colonial Jordan, Poland/Ukraine, etc.) and were often voluntary choices. Not all of them endured, but some. They are strong symbols of social integration, or reintegration. The forces of non-violence are not to be underestimated.

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<sup>26</sup> For example, see the chapters by Nikita Hock and Andreas Zeman in this volume.

<sup>27</sup> See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, esp. chapters 10 and 11; Jan Gross, *Polish Society Under German Occupation: The General Government, 1939–1944* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 147–150, 177; Jan Gross, *Revolution from Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 122. In his chapter in this volume, Nikita Hock does use the term “atomization” but with a different meaning than the all-encompassing understanding denoted in totalitarianism theory.

<sup>28</sup> This is another reason why it makes sense to study persecution, rather than violence.

It is necessary to add several remarks as a matter of qualification. The fact that this was mostly about the integration of women and children<sup>29</sup> is telling about the subordinate social position of those enjoying this inclusion in patriarchal contexts. Furthermore, as almost all chapters mention, these new families were always built after the loss of original ones due to murder or unbearable conditions of life. And our heavy emphasis on post-conflict accounts may create an overly optimistic picture, because they provide the perspective of survivors – persecuted people (often a minority) who were successful in their effort at social (re)integration.

This is also to say that most chapters here are about relations between a persecuted group and wider society; or they cover more than one persecuted group and describe their interrelations, like the contributions of Tingler and Cerovic. A few chapters focus on social relations and structures within the persecuted Jewish minority – because those under persecution were also divided. Cole shows new intra-group ties emerging; Wurbs does the same but under conditions of social and political conflict among those persecuted; Ofer demonstrates how social roles within the family evolved; Shternshis, Wurbs and Cole find traces of collective action.<sup>30</sup> In sum, social relations changed under the enormous pressures of persecution and its effects.

A better understanding of the pressures involved requires some knowledge of context. The political situations differ (global war in the Ottoman Empire or in German-occupied territories in Eastern Europe; and a war of decolonization in Portuguese-Mozambique), but in each case study in this volume a war was going on. And all of our studies without exception describe poverty and a lack of resources (though poverty is hardly used as an analytical concept). Importantly, it was not only those under persecution who suffered from poverty and want, but also the majority of those living in their vicinity. Persecuted people, but also many in the society around them, were just experiencing impoverishment. Such downward social mobility was a consequence of war and mass violence, but in complex processes, mass violence was also fueled by social change in the first place.<sup>31</sup> Not only political threats, but also social pressures, sometimes distress – mostly under capitalist conditions –, were felt by more than one group, which put limits on solidarity, spurred rivalry and instigated the drive for private gain.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> With the exception of some cases described in Natalia Aleksion's chapter.

<sup>30</sup> Collective action – across ethnicized groups – is also traced in the chapter by Masha Cerovic.

<sup>31</sup> This is the argument in Christian Gerlach, *Extremely Violent Societies: Mass Violence in the Twentieth-Century World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

<sup>32</sup> Hilmar Kaiser's, Jason Tingler's and Christian Gerlach's chapters stress the importance of economic interests.



Within the interconnections between social change and persecution, the authors of this volume explore in particular how social relations shifted. This includes labor relations, the search for a livelihood, family and gender relations and, often implicitly, relationships between the urban and rural,<sup>33</sup> social structures that permeated seemingly totally ethnicized forms of order.

## Structure of this book

The volume is arranged according to seven themes. The first two chapters examine labor relations of persecuted people. In his study about the Ottoman Empire, Hilmar Kaiser argues that Muslims' dealings with Armenians during their persecution of 1915–1918 were determined by rational considerations about economic utility. The existence or absence of labor demand, and for certain skills in particular, strongly influenced whether Armenians were taken in and employed where authorities' policies or their lack of power allowed room for such decisions. Comparing labor relations among Armenians with those of persecuted Jews in German-occupied Poland 1942–1944, Christian Gerlach points to similarities. He emphasizes that Armenians and Jews mostly performed lowly qualified labor; that they were exploited and that especially women and children were thus accepted by parts of society as inferior social groups; and that many Armenians, unlike Jews, were integrated into Muslim families as wives or foster children with an affection that went beyond economic interest, although all of them had to work. Both chapters show a process of temporary downward social mobility (presumably permanent in some cases).

Moving to the sphere of reproduction, the chapters by Dalia Ofer and Natalia Aleksiu explore family ties. Ofer examines changes in the role of Jewish fatherhood under persecution. Describing the case of one intellectual – a religious Zionist – in the Warsaw ghetto in detail, she shows that, mixing traditional and modern elements, he tried to perform a male role as a breadwinner, protector and affectionate supporter but was unable to meet the first two goals. His wife and daughter perished. His self-image was challenged by his own and thus his family's social descent, but he continued trying to make a living (literally) and remained politically active. Aleksiu points to a number of phenomena involving Jews and non-Jews in mixed family or para-family relations that lasted after liberation. This includes Christians' adoption of Jewish children and marriages or similar relationships between Jews and non-Jews, often forged under persecution

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**33** For the latter, see the contributions by Masha Cerovic and Jason Tingler in this volume.

and with common children. She describes relatively dense social networks and argues that many of these relationships were of an ambivalent character, or emerged out of utilitarian motives before involving emotional bonds, and that differences in behavior between men and women may not have been as great as one could expect. Under persecution, many families were crushed, but occasionally new ties also emerged.

As far as social history goes, domestic refugees are an intriguing but understudied topic. Do they indicate a disintegration of society? How do they organize themselves? The answers given by Andreas Zeman and Masha Cerovic differ. In her chapter about rural Belarus under German occupation, 1941–1944, Cerovic argues that displacement had a deep impact on society as a whole. Multi-directional refugee flows loosened ties in village communities but created new inter-local or interregional links. Solidarity between locals and refugees worked on the whole, Cerovic states, despite tensions, the violent rejection of some groups and unequal access to resources. By contrast, Zeman finds that locals in Mozambique's Lago district during the war of decolonization (1964–1975) could only live in great numbers as refugees in the bush and forest for a short time. Portuguese attacks on fields left them without livelihood and forced most either to surrender or to emigrate to Malawi. Groups were unstable and highly mobile. Zeman stresses the guerrillas' lack of control in the region he studies, Cerovic shows the impact of the partisans' fervor for social organization. Cerovic's and Zeman's pioneering and rich studies still contain relatively little detail about the social hierarchy under conditions of clandestine rural life, but we can assume that women were in vulnerable positions in a world of militant men,<sup>34</sup> that older people lost influence, as did men with invalidated professions such as those from the intelligentsia, whereas (male) youth gained power.

Unlike these two chapters about broader populations under persecution, those in the following section deal with the question how people from a persecuted minority – Jews – use and appropriate space. Both Tim Cole and Nikita Hock argue that Jews' relationship to space and place reveals that they had a bit of agency, although within places where they were segregated and under permanent threat. Hock's study of the special setting of hiding places (attics) through sound history highlights social isolation because of lack of acoustic insulation. Especially in rural attics, hiding Jews could hear life around them going on, sadly aware that they were excluded. Their movements were extremely restricted for the fear of being heard and denounced, and they could not make these places

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<sup>34</sup> See Masha Cerovic, *Les enfants de Staline: La guerre des partisans soviétiques (1941–1944)* (Paris: Seuil, 2018), 103–109.

something resembling a temporary home. Therefore attics were usually only used for short periods as hiding places (unlike underground shelters). Inquiry into noise-making and the feelings it caused in listeners also shows that within host households, some members approved of helping Jews more than others and illustrates how complex and fragile relationships between hosts and hosted were. Tim Cole demonstrates that even within an extremely hostile space like the Auschwitz concentration camp, female Jewish inmates formed little groups that occupied small spaces (a bunk bed) and attempted reproduction and survival together by things like sharing food and marching together in a row – practices excluding others. This collectivity is reflected by survivors constantly placing their experience in ghettos, transports, camps and workplaces within larger or smaller groups and expressing their experiences in terms of “we.” In the course of their persecution, their old groups of belonging were replaced by new ones, which emerged under the conditions of spatial situations imposed on them. In Cole’s and Hock’s studies, space/place co-determines social reorganization.

Moving one step further from collective experience, the contributions in the following section explore collective action through the cultural practices of people living under persecution – in this case, Jews. Both Janina Wurbs’ and Anna Shternshis’ chapters are about singing, though in very different contexts. Wurbs’ chapter describes the case of a popular street singer in the Łódź ghetto (under German control) who mocked and criticized the Jewish leadership, whom he held in part responsible for the hunger and misery of the people. With the help of influential Jewish supporters who advertised his songs, he created spontaneous communities united by listening, or singing refrains, who shared his bitter criticism. Shternshis writes about a different situation – songs created, widely memorized and often collectively sung in Transnistrian ghettos under Romanian rule. Often these songs were for keeping the memory of mass murders committed by Romanians or Germans alive, while others mocked Hitler and the Germans, but some also criticized the indifference either of Jewish inmates in general or, again, of the Jewish leadership, toward orphaned Jewish children. Like Wurbs’ (and Zeman’s) chapter, this points to social conflicts over scarce resources, especially food, among people under persecution, when they were under German or Romanian strangleholds. In both chapters, cultural practices reveal an active attitude instead of escapism and passivity.

Jason Tinger’s local history of the area around the German extermination camp in Sobibór in occupied Poland exemplifies how violence works as a social process. Unlike earlier studies about connections between death camps and their

vicinity,<sup>35</sup> Tingle embeds his analysis in a broader framework of multiple groups, conflicts and multi-directional violence. Society in this rural area changed through several waves of forced immigration and emigration in the context of ethnic resettlement, forced labor recruitment, partisan struggle and civil war. The ethnic makeup and hierarchies within the population shifted. German violence and threats against farmers found not delivering goods or helping Jews, along with widespread impoverishment, contributed to a brutalization that made some locals rob and murder Jewish refugees, others offer services to camp personnel awash with valuables stolen from murdered Jews, and still others hope for social ascent otherwise. Circles of solidarity became smaller, materialism gained ground and tensions became conflicts, conditions under which the death camp became near-inescapable for Jews.

What about social structures long after violence? Anna Ohannessian-Charpin shows that Armenian women, once deported to the south of the Ottoman Empire and among the few survivors in Ma'an in what later became Jordan, married (many as first wives) into a few interrelated Bedouin families and became well-respected in local society. They created close local networks of kinship and friendship and gained status first by certain skills that were hardly known among locals and later, from the late 1950s onward, through their international contacts and travel to rediscovered relatives around the world. Locally, "Armenian" was no derogatory term in the 1980s. Characteristically, however, these young women had married only into clans of a lesser status, and no Armenian men were integrated. Ohannessian-Charpin depicts different forms of social integration slowly overcoming earlier fragmentation, a topic also raised in Gerlach's chapter. In doing so, she questions the notion of persecuted people as constituting a solid social group.

Anna Ohannessian-Charpin in particular, and also Natalia Aleksion, look at long-term processes. More generally, the authors of this collection analyze life under mass violence and persecution as a social process<sup>36</sup> that involves at least a medium-term timeframe. With this book, research about these developments of social restructuring has not reached its end; rather, it is just in its beginnings.

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<sup>35</sup> See Jan Burzlaff, "In the Shadow of the Gas Chambers: Social Dynamics and Everyday Life around the Killing Center at Bełżec (1941–1944)," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 35, 3 (2021): 445–463; Sybille Steinbacher, *"Musterstadt" Auschwitz: Germanisierungspolitik und Judenmord in Ostoberschlesien* (Münich: K.G. Saur, 2000).

<sup>36</sup> Sheri Rosenberg, "Genocide Is a Process, Not an Event," *Genocide Studies and Prevention* 7, 1 (2012): 16–23 calls for regarding genocide as a process but argues that this position is far from dominant.

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